DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 350 UD 031 843

AUTHOR Morgan, Harry
TITLE Social Distance and Race in Public Schools: Grades Five through Twelve.
PUB DATE 12 Apr 96
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 8-12, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; *Black Students; Educational Practices; Elementary School Students; *Friendship; Intermediate Grades; Interpersonal Relationship; Public Policy; *Public Schools; Racial Differences; *School Desegregation; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; *Socialization; *Student Attitudes; White Students
IDENTIFIERS Georgia (Atlanta Metropolitan Area); *Social Distance

ABSTRACT

This study investigated friendship preferences among black and white students in Georgia public schools in an effort to determine the status of racial barriers among students in current desegregated schools. A measure of social distance was developed for the study based on work by L. Thurstone (1929), E. Bogardus (1965) and others. The extent to which current social attitudes, public policy, and school practices might influence interracial friendships was studied in the 309 responses from students in grades 5 through 12 in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Greater social distance was generally reported by whites than blacks, and by males than females, although gender differences did not reach statistical significance. Social distance was least in the lowest grades, and progressed as children progressed through the grades. In the secondary grades, cross-race socialization becomes a race and social class issue. Results show that, in this environment, the longer children remain in desegregated school environments, the less likely they are to value interracial friendships. (Contains 1 figure, 2 tables, and 15 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Social Distance and Race in Public Schools: Grades Five Through Twelve.

ED 410 350

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Harry Morgan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

UD031843

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Presented at AERA
New York, N.Y.
April 12, 1996

HARRY MORGAN
WEST GEORGIA COLLEGE
CARROLLTON, GA 30118

SOCIAL DISTANCE AND RACE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: GRADES FIVE THROUGH TWELVE

Objectives

This study investigated friendship preferences among black and white pupils in Georgia public schools. This was an attempt to determine the status of racial barriers among black and white students in current desegregated school environments in the south. A measure of social distance was designed by the researcher for Georgia school children using procedures previously employed by Borgadus, Thorndike, and others.

Theoretical Framework

Following the gradual implementation of school desegregation, which started in the mid 1950s, a great deal of research focused upon various aspects of change within that environment. Among those studies were examinations of black/white social interaction, the influence of desegregation on academic achievement, and school climate. Allport (1954) suggested that desegregation was a first step toward integrated schooling. It was his theory that integrated classrooms would result in greater interracial acceptance, and ultimately, hostility among people of different races would be substantially reduced. This idea became known as *contact theory*. Allport made it clear that a mere mixing of races would not constitute a test for contact theory. Pettigrew (1967) suggested that a truly integrated environment would have the unequivocal support of authorities, support by custom or law, equal status of races within the contact environment, shared goals, and an equal opportunity to pursue these goals.

Allport's work appeared amidst an avalanche of racial preference studies that reported a black negative/white positive view of self that tended to emerge from both segregated and desegregated school environments. It was generally reported that both black and white children demonstrated a preference for white characteristics (skin color, etc.), when faced with racial choices (Clark & Clark,1939; Williams & Moreland,1967; Dent 1978).

Many studies that reported black child self-rejection were criticized for utilizing methodologies that relied almost exclusively upon *forced-choice* procedures. Such procedures, it was argued, negated the subjects' freedom of choice, and introduced examiner bias (Katz & Zalk,1974; Morgan,1991). Despite these criticisms,

UD031843

investigators in large numbers, continued to report that "white characteristics" were preferred by both racial groups. If true, this would surely confound *contact theory* in the midst of self-rejection by blacks, and an equally powerful black-rejection by whites. Studies reporting these phenomena reached their peak during the 1950s through the 1960s. Very few studies, however, have been reported on this topic in the 1990s.

This study investigated the extent to which current social attitudes, public policy and school practices might influence interracial friendships among school children, as expressed through their friendship preferences.

Data Source

For this study, 309 usable responses were secured from children enrolled in metropolitan Atlanta area schools. Pupils were selected from grades 5 through 12. In this group, 150 were female, and 159 were male, with 128 being black, and 181 white. Reports from pupils were divided into three sections by grade. The sections were comprised of 103 pupils in grades 5-7; 100 in grades 8-9: and 106 pupils in grades 10-12.

Methods and Techniques

Using a method designed by L. L. Thurstone (1929) to measure social distance, a scale to measure social preferences was designed especially for this study. E. S. Bogardus (1965) was among the first to utilize the Thurstone procedure. He developed scales to measure three domains; *social distance, racial distance, occupational distance, and religious distance.*. He suggested that racial, religious, and occupational groups, through attitudes toward "in-group" and "out-group" characteristics, will express intimate or distant feelings toward other groups. Bogardus reported that greater social distance will be demonstrated when one group feels threatened or their social status is challenged. For example, confrontations emerged in various US cities in the mid 1960s when whites felt threatened by school integration.

With school desegregation somewhat achieved; and perceptions of out-group threats reduced through desegregated school environments, the present study was designed to measure social distance between black and white children in Georgia. This was done through the utilization of a scale designed to assess social preferences.

The scale developed for this study started with a list of 45 statements of intimate racial proximity along a continuum from a willingness to live in the same state—live in the same town—live in the same neighborhood—live on the same street—be a friend in school,etc.—to the last item, willing to marry an other-race person. To construct a scale of seven items, a group of 32 teachers enrolled in a graduate research course were asked to participate in an activity of rating 45 statements that represented varying degrees of social preference, along an 8 step bipolar plane from 0 to 7. The participating graduate students were given these instructions:

As a teacher, please indicate your perception of your pupil's response to this statement: *In my personal view, I could be a friend to an other-race person in school.*

If in your perception the fifth grade pupil's response would be extremely *positive*, place an **X** here.....

Always X **Never**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

If in your perception the pupil's response would be extremely *negative*, place an **X** here.....

Always **X Never**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Or, if you perceive your pupil's choice as neither positive nor negative, place the X towards the middle of the line on the side that you think pupil's would select.

The mean scores from the teacher's choices were calculated for the 45 statements. The means derived from the teacher choices ranged from .07 to 6.87. Those statements having means closest to 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 4.0, 5.0, 6.0, 7.0, were selected as items for the scale, and led to the following questions on the pupil questionnaire:

If I were free to choose, I could accept an other race person (black/white), as.....

1. A friend in school
2. A friend outside of school
3. A friend to invite to a party in my home
4. A friend with whom I could go on a regular date
5. A friend with whom I could go on a prom date
6. A person I could accept as a step parent
7. A person to whom I could be married

Items were presented to students by their classroom teachers, after they were informed that participation was voluntary. Teacher and school (requests were made through the school administrators), participation was also voluntary. Several schools declined to participate in the study after it was explained to them. Eventually, 309 usable completed responses were obtained. Items selected for the scale were presented in a Likert format, with stems composed of always (1), most of the time (2), sometimes (3), almost never (4), never (5). The lowest derived means (1), indicated the *highest* social preference or the *least* social distance. Conversely, the *higher* means (5), indicated the *lowest* social preference, or the *greatest* social distance.

Results

Means were calculated by race, gender, group and grades. One-way ANOVA was employed to measure levels of significance. Generally greater social distance was reported by whites than blacks. Greater social distance was also reported by females than males of both races (Table I). Gender differences were reported for all questions, with females reporting greater distance than males, but none of the gender differences reached a level of significance. For race, differences were reported for all questions with levels of significance being reached for all questions except question # 1. For the three grade levels, differences reported between groups were significant for all questions except #1 and #3 (table II). The lower grades reported the least social distance; with the other grade sections reporting progressively greater social distance as children advanced through the grades. When differences were reported on each question for grade sections (5-6; 7-9; 10-12), only questions #1 and #3 failed to reach significant differences (Table II).

Conclusions

Gary Orfield, Director of Harvard University's Project on School Desegregation, reported that 1995 marked the first time in 40 years that black children and white children in the south became less likely to go to school together than their older brothers and sisters had been. Even in desegregated settings, according to Orfield, re-segregation occurs in classrooms because many schools follow various academic policies that sort students into low and high performers. Orfield and others have identified these tracking policies as causing serious academic damage to black and poor children.

Allports *contact theory* pointed out significant differences between desegregation and integration. Desegregation removed legal barriers against black and white children attending the same schools. Integration, on the other hand, implied cross-race interactions would occur academically and socially within the school environment. Schools involved in this study were desegregated, but very little effort was devoted to cross-race socialization. Following desegregation of the public schools, various means were employed to carry out the federal law. Busing, magnet schools, limited grades assigned to a single school site, etc. Educators were also fearful that "white flight" would leave certain districts with too few white children to desegregate. Several strategies were employed to lure white parents to predominantly black schools, and black students to predominantly white schools.

On the positive side, periods of "open enrollment" (usually and few weeks prior to school opening), were established to allow parents to transfer their children to a school in which their race was in numerical minority. On the negative side, in communities where blacks constituted 40-50% of the population, various tracking systems were devised to assure white parents that their children would have access to an almost exclusively white, academically rigorous classrooms. Some schools

provide "white only" set-asides like cheer leader clubs that met in the homes of white parents, debate teams, choral groups and drama clubs that select theatrical pieces that could specify white-only performers.

It has been reported that such school practices undermined a major aspect of education—the formation of student friendship groups. Schofield (1979) has reported that interracial friendships decline when schools sort pupils in tracked programs. For modern education, Stanford and Roach (1974) suggested over 20 years ago that social interaction in schools was one of the most important issues of our time.

> *Friendship is an extremely important aspect of education, and practices which undermine formation of student friendships need to be revised or discontinued (p 31).*

Racial isolation within school is as serious as racial isolation outside of school. Unfortunately, community institutions like churches support the separation of races to maintain their own financial security that was—more often than not established or enhanced—during the time when all segments of US society were racially segregated. Black churches provided meeting places and moral support for civil rights activists in the 1950s and 60s. The black church's participation during that period increased community awareness and national recognition of their role. They are unwilling, however, to participate as actively in desegregating predominantly black churches as they were in desegregating schools and other public accommodations.

In this study, whites rejected intermarriage to a greater extent than blacks. As children enter secondary school grades and mate-choice age, cross-race socialization becomes a *race* and *social class* issue. It is also often true, that for white parents with children in public schools, race is often a proxy for social class. Intimate social friendships that might lead to interracial dating, and possibly marriage, would call forth school, neighborhood, and family taboos that exist for black and white children.Subjects in this study demonstrated this phenomenon clearly, as students in the upper grades reported significantly greater racial social distance than children in the lower grades.

Unfortunately, the longer children in this study remained in desegregated school environments, the less likely they were to value interracial friendships. A more hopeful sign can be found in the fact that for questions #3 and beyond, none of the groups reported a negative mean level as high as what was predicted (Expected Means), by grade school teachers employed in designing the instrument.

References

Allport, G. (1954) *The nature of prejudice.* Cambridge: Addison-Wesley

Augustine, G. (1989). Just when you thought it was safe: Racism in the schools. *Educational Horizons,* 67(4), 156-162.

Bogardus, E. F. & Crowther (1965). *A workbook for the study of social interaction.* Chicago, IL: Rand McNally

Clark, K. B., & Clark, M. K. (1947). Racial identification and preferences in Negro children. In E. E. Macory. M. Newcomb, and E. L. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in social psychology.* New York: Holt.

Dent, E. (1978). The salience of the prowhite/antiblack Bias. Child Development, 49, 1280-1283.

Katz, P. A. & Zalk, S. R. (1974). Doll preferences: An index of racial attitudes? *Journal of Educational Psychology 66 (5),* 663-668.

Lomotey, K. (1989). Cultural diversity in the school: Implications for principals. *NASSP bulletin* 73, 521,81-88.

Morgan, H. (1991). Doll studies revisited: Is the message in the method? *Western Journal of Black Studies, 15 (4),* pp. 248-253.

Pettigrew, T. F. (1967). Social evolution theory. Convergencies and applications. In D. Levine (ED), *Nebraska symposium on motivation.* Vol. 15, Lincoln, NE:University of Nebraska Press.

Savard, W. G., & Aragon, A. R. (1989). *Racial justice survey final report.* Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, OR.

Schofield, J. (1979). The impact of positively structured contact on intergroup behavior: Does it last under adverse conditions? *Social Psychology Quarterly, 42,* 280-284.

Thurstone, L. L. (1929). *The measurement of attitude.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Totten, S. (1989). Resources for teaching about racism. *Educational Leadership,* 47(2), 82.

Williams, J. E., & Morland, J. K. (1967). *Race color and the young child.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

TABLE I
MEANS AND ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY RACE, GENDER, AND GROUP

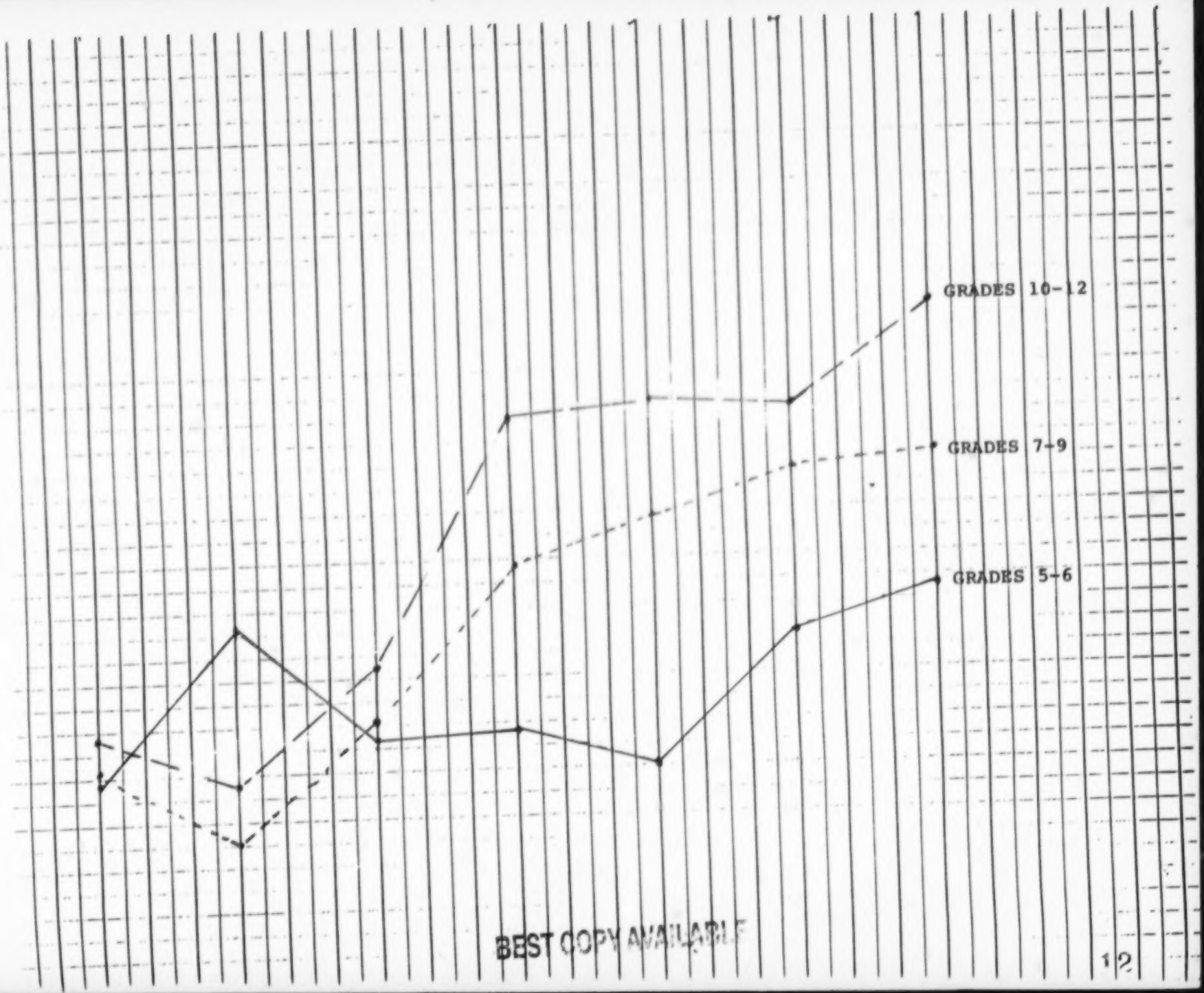
Question	Race		*F* Values	Gender		*F* Values	Group
	B	W	For Race	F	M	For Gender	Means
1	1.98	2.13	$F(1,307) = 1.12$, $p < .29$ *	2.08	2.06	$F(1,307) = .03$, $p < .86$	2.07
2	1.85	2.25	$F(1,307) = 8.71$, $p < .003$	2.05	2.13	$F(1,307) = .41$, $p < .52$ *	2.09
3	2.89	2.40	$F(1,307) = 4.50$, $p < .03$	2.21	2.33	$F(1,307) = .73$, $p < .39$ *	2.27
4	2.57	3.04	$F(1,307) = 6.86$, $p < .009$	2.73	2.96	$F(1,307) = 1.72$, $p < .19$ *	2.85
5	2.77	3.17	$F(1,307) = 5.38$, $p < .02$	2.94	3.03	$F(1,307) = .22$, $p < .64$ *	2.99
6	2.65	3.35	$F(1,307) = 16.29$, $p < .001$	3.08	3.04	$F(1,307) = .04$, $p < .84$	3.06
7	2.96	3.64	$F(1.307) = 15.50$, $p < .0001$	3.24	3.47	$F(1,307) = 1.77$, $p < .18$ *	3.36
N	128	181			50	159	309

* Not Significant

TABLE II
MEANS AND ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY GRADE LEVELS

Question	Grades 5-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	*F* Values
1	1.97	2.05	2.18	$F(2,306) = .85$, $p < .43$ *
2	2.61	1.70	1.95	$F(2,306) = 18.30$, $p < .0001$
3	2.13	2.23	2.45	$F(2,306) = 1.72$, $p < .18$ *
4	2.17	2.86	3.50	$F(2,306) = 21.05$, $p < .0001$
5	2.05	3.08	3.82	$F(2,306) = 41.01$, $p < .0001$
6	2.58	2.97	3.61	$F(2,306) = 12.71$, $p < .0001$
7	2.86	3.25	3.94	$F(2,306) = 14.55$, $p < .0001$
N	103	100	106	

* Not Significant



BEST COPY AVAILABLE